

Joseph Stacy Murdock

"In 1849 I joined the Minutemen. I was the third to join, only William Kimball and George Grant were before me. Our duty was to watch the Indians and look after the welfare of the people. We often had trouble with the Indians, right up to the Indian War in Utah County."⁽⁸⁾ The war in Utah County was the first battle the settlers fought, at Battle Creek, now Pleasant Grove. "I was in the first battle and saw the first Indian shot, by Delbert Miles. He shot him out of a tree. I saw the Indian up in a tree and drew my gun to shoot when Miles stepped up and said, what are you shooting at? I said, Do you see that Indian in the tree? and he fired and shot him out of the tree. The Indian came down head first, dead."⁽⁹⁾ The battle continued and Joseph was again narrowly spared from death, only one of the many close calls he had and which he described.

"We went up the (Provo) river a ways and I went into a little opening when an Indian crawled up behind me. The snow was two feet deep. There was a log behind me across the opening. The Indian crawled on his belly to this log and made a hole through the snow with his rifle. My back was towards him. He got a dead rest on me and pulled the trigger. His rifle was an old flintlock and I heard the click of the lock and turned my head quickly and saw the flash of the powder. I dropped to the ground and heard the ball pass over me. The Indian gave a yell, but he didn't get me. I was alright."⁽¹⁰⁾

The fight at Battle Creek ended after four Indians were killed. Joseph returned to Salt Lake City on March 6th, but it wouldn't be long until he was called to fight the Indians again. On his return Joseph was appointed City Constable, a job that claimed every spare

minute he had, and with all his other duties he had little time to spare. As Constable he worked closely with such well known lawmen and lawyers as Marshal Porter Rockwell, Hosea Stout and Bill Hickman. He had known all three at Nauvoo and had been ordained a Presiding Elder under the hand of Hosea Stout. His friendship with Porter Rockwell when he was accused of the attempted assassination of Governor Boggs grew into an even stronger bond after they arrived in Zion and that friendship resulted in a strange event which changed Joseph's entire life.

When the Saints entered the Great Salt Lake Valley they were appalled to learn how extensive the Indian slave trade was. Strong bands like Chief Wakara's Utes would steal small children from weak tribes such as the Diggers and sell them into slavery at Santa Fe or Taos, New Mexico. John R. Young described just how repulsive the practice was. "Some of Wanship's band had just returned from a fight with Little Wolf's braves, where they succeeded in taking two small girls as prisoners. They had killed one girl and was torturing the other. She was the saddest looking piece of humanity I have ever seen. They had shingled her hair with knives and fire brands. All of the fleshy parts of her body, arms and legs had been hacked with knives, and fire brands had been driven into the wounds. She was gaunt from hunger and was smeared from head to toe with blood and ashes. Charley Decker purchased her from the Indians and brought her to my house where she was washed and clothed." (11)

To put a stop to the slave trade, Brigham Young forbid Spanish slavers from entering Utah and urged Mormon families to purchase or

adopt small children who were innocent victims of tribal wars. Solomon Carvalho described how Young himself adopted two Indian children. "When I returned to camp I learned that Governor Young had just purchased two children of about two or three years of age from the Utes. They had been prisoners who were stolen from the Snakes. When the Governor first saw them, they were out in the deep snow, digging with their little fingers for grass or roots. They were just living skeletons. I never saw a more piteous sight than those two naked infants, in bitter cold weather on the open snow, reduced by starvation to the verge of the grave." (12)

At the time of the first Indian troubles in Utah Valley, both Joseph and Porter Rockwell were with the militia. At the mouth of Provo Canyon Rockwell captured an Indian Chief who had two small children with him. The children had been captured from another tribe and were to be sold as slaves. Their feet had been tied together and they were hung head down across the Chief's horse. One was a boy about six years of age while the other was a girl about a year younger. They had been terribly abused as was always the case when one tribe captured children from another. Both were naked and covered with dried blood, and they had been starved for days. Their tiny arms and legs had been slashed with knives and their hair was matted with dry blood and was full of burrs, thorns and dirt. Rockwell didn't know what to do with the children, so he asked Joseph to take them.

Joseph was at a loss to know what to do. He and Eunice had been married for seven years, but still had no children. He knew that

Brigham Young had counselled the settlers to purchase or adopt Indian children whenever they could. He was wondering what to do when he recalled an incident his friend Daniel Jones had just told him of. Chief Arrapene had captured a small child from another band but because of Brigham Young's new ban on Spanish slavers he could not sell the child. Jones had told Joseph that Chief Arrapene had been enraged and had brought the child to him, telling Jones that the Mormons had no right to keep the Spanish from buying the children unless they bought them themselves. "Arrapene then took the child by the heels and dashed its brains out on the hard ground and then threw its body towards us, saying we had no hearts or we would have bought the child to save its life. It was a strange argument, but it was the argument of an enraged savage."⁽¹³⁾

Joseph feared what might happen to the children if he did not take them, but greater than his fear for their lives was his love for the children. He knew that Eunice would love them also, so when he saw the pitiful little figures in Rockwell's arms his heart went out to them. He decided then and there to take them as his own to be the children he and Eunice had never had.

The two Indian children were taken home to Eunice, who washed and scrubbed them and dug the burrs from their hair, to find two beautiful little children under all that dirt. In his journal Joseph wrote, "The boy was just shedding his baby teeth and the girl was about a year younger."⁽¹⁴⁾ It was unknown which tribe they had been stolen from, but they didn't have Ute features, but looked more like Shoshonis. When given bread and milk they could

use a spoon, but used their fingers to eat the bread and drank the milk. Eunice named the girl Pernetta, which had been her grand-mother's name. She called the boy Supickett, which sounded most nearly like the name he tried to tell them, but he was always called "Pick" for short. Eunice had prayed for children of her own, and now she lavished all the love she had on her two little Lamanite children. Hyrum Smith's prophecy that Joseph would be blessed with a large family was beginning to come true at last, if only in a small way.

During the summer of 1849 many new immigrants arrived at Salt Lake City, and without exception they all told of their difficulties crossing the Green River, where Joseph had been forced to build a cottonwood raft to ferry his wagons across. Brigham Young called upon Joseph to lead a mission to the Green where he was to build a ferry to hasten the pioneer's emigration in safety. Accordingly, Joseph with Bill Hickman and eight others loaded their wagons with supplies and started back over the mountains to the Green. It took a great deal of the hardest kind of labor to build a ferry boat and string rope across the wide, deep and treacherous river, but the California gold rush was in full swing and pioneer wagon trains mixed with those of the gold seekers lined up for miles to use the new ferry. Joseph wrote of his trip to the Green River and of his adventures there.

"I started to Green River with 9 others to put in a ferry boat to cross the pioneers and those going to California. We traveled to Bear River, which was bank full and swift. I could not get any of the boys to take the rope across, so I took the largest horse and

started into the river. The water ran over the horse's back. I crossed to an island, then down the river until I got across. I had the boys put the ropes to the wagon and hold on. I put a rope to a yoke of oxen and to the horn of my saddle. I rode the lead horse, so we got through with all the teams and was safe on the other side of the river, and I thanked the Lord for his mercy in our protection."⁽¹⁵⁾ It was an especially dangerous job for Joseph for he had never learned to swim.

"We moved to Bridger's Fort and then to Green River. There we built a flat boat and began crossing emigrants. With four others then went to Sublette's Crossing where we built a flat boat large enough to cross three wagons at once. We could cross the ferry in fifty minutes, towing up one side with the oxen, and then rowing down river to land on the other side. As we were crossing and I was coiling the rope, one of the boys struck me across the back with an oar, knocking me into the river. I came up with my hands on the front of the boat and the boys pulled me on board alright, so I was saved. We had a rough set of men to deal with. They would steal our horses and cattle. I had to work day and night, but we made lots of money. We got seven dollars a wagon, so we cleared about one thousand dollars each. When we returned to Salt Lake City I paid my tithing and was blessed."⁽¹⁶⁾

We can only wonder how Eunice managed while Joseph was gone, having two small Indian children to raise and still take care of their farm at the same time. And although his mother Sally had Nymphus to help her, life must have been hard for her also, and

she must have become discouraged at times. But she never lost her faith in Joseph Smith or the Book Of Mormon, as we can see in a letter written at Salt Lake City on July 6th, 1849 by Irene Hoscall Pomeroy, a friend of Sally's from Massachusetts days to Col. Wilson Andrew at New Salem. The letter refers to Lucy Harris, wife of Martin Harris, one of the three witnesses to the Book Of Mormon. Lucy Harris had denied that the plates of gold were real and Martin Harris had been excommunicated from the church. The letter said in part, "Sister Murdock is here, she that was Sally Stacy and a neighbor to us, as strong a Mormon as I ever saw. When Lucy Harris receives a letter from her, she will know the whole of her mind, for she is not afraid to speak or write it!" (17)

When winter came and the emigrant trade fell off, Joseph returned from Green River to his wife and home, but he would spend little time there, for in January, 1850 Indian attacks began again at Fort Utah and he was called to Utah Valley again. The troubles began when an Indian named Old Bishop stole a shirt from a settler. When the man who had lost the shirt saw Old Bishop wearing it, an argument erupted and in the resulting fight Old Bishop was killed. In return Chief Opecarry and Chief Big Elk led raiding parties which stole fifty or sixty horses from the settlers.

A posse of Minutemen including Joseph and led by Captain Peter Conover engaged the Indians in a running battle which started on February 8th. The Indians were pursued from near Fort Utah into Rock Canyon where Chief Big Elk was killed and his body secretly concealed by his warriors. The fight continued past the south end of Utah Lake